



DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE  
59TH MEDICAL WING (AETC)  
JOINT BASE SAN ANTONIO - LACKLAND TEXAS

24 MAY 2016

MEMORANDUM FOR SGVT

ATTN: CAPT MARY ZANDER

FROM: 59 MDW/SGVU

SUBJECT: Professional Presentation Approval

1. Your paper, entitled **The Spiritual Needs of the Religiously Unaffiliated Airmen and Trainees in Basic Military Training** presented at/published to the **Division 19 Section, APA Conference 2016, Denver, CO 5 Aug 2016** with MDWI 41-108, and has been assigned local file #**16199**.
2. Pertinent biographic information (name of author(s), title, etc.) has been entered into our computer file. Please advise us (by phone or mail) that your presentation was given. At that time, we will need the date (month, day and year) along with the location of your presentation. It is important to update this information so that we can provide quality support for you, your department, and the Medical Center commander. This information is used to document the scholarly activities of our professional staff and students, which is an essential component of Wilford Hall Ambulatory Surgical Center (WHASC) internship and residency programs.
3. Please know that if you are a Graduate Health Sciences Education student and your department has told you they cannot fund your publication, the 59th Clinical Research Division may pay for your basic journal publishing charges (to include costs for tables and black and white photos). We cannot pay for reprints. If you are 59 MDW staff member, we can forward your request for funds to the designated wing POC.
4. Congratulations, and thank you for your efforts and time. Your contributions are vital to the medical mission. We look forward to assisting you in your future publication/presentation efforts.

Linda Steel Goodwin

LINDA STEEL-GOODWIN, Col, USAF, BSC  
Director, Clinical Investigations & Research Support

## PROCESSING OF PROFESSIONAL MEDICAL RESEARCH/TECHNICAL PUBLICATIONS/PRESENTATIONS

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***"The voluntary, fully informed consent of the subjects used in this research was obtained as required by 32 CFR 219 and DODI 3216.02\_AFI 40-402."***

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**Title:** The Spiritual Needs of the Religiously Unaffiliated Airmen and Trainees in Basic Military Training

### **Abstract**

#### **Statement of Problem:**

In the United States the “religiously unaffiliated” are growing (Pew Research Center, 2015). This group includes atheists, agnostics, and “nothing in particular,” and now accounts for 22.8% of the U.S. population. These figures are not unique to civilians and are replicated across our joint branches of the U.S. Military (Military Leadership Diversity Commission, 2010); 25.50% of Service Members (SMs) identify as religiously unaffiliated and 3.61% as Humanist. Evidence points to a clear, and growing, cultural presence of the religiously unaffiliated in our U.S. Military (Hunter & Smith, 2009). There are significant differences in religious attitudes between enlisted members and their officer leadership, with only 15.65% of officers holding religiously unaffiliated beliefs compared to 27.63% of enlisted members (Hunter & Smith, 2009). In this atmosphere, without systemic support for their beliefs, many young service members may feel adrift and alienated as they attempt to assimilate into their new military culture.

In August 2014, a programmatic innovation supported by the U.S. Air Force emerged to serve this group. The Humanist Group developed after one atheist trainee requested to meet with a non-theistic chaplain. His request sparked a program that now serves Basic Trainees and Airmen every week during the 8.5 weeks they are in Basic Military Training (BMT). The Humanist Group is currently the only a-theistic programming in the Department of Defense that functions exclusively to serve the non-religious spiritual needs of this population. The program includes an 8-week sequential format through the following topics: (1) Humanism, Communication, and Military Life, (2) Morals, (3) Fallacies, (4) Coming out, (5) Separation of church and state, (6) “Nones”, (7) Grief and stress, and (8) Death.

#### **Participants:**

The participants include BMT trainees and graduates, who may or may not identify as religiously unaffiliated, as well as the Retired, Active Duty, and civilian volunteer facilitators, who identify as Atheist, Humanist, or Agnostic. Roughly 400 Basic Trainees and Airmen attend the group every week. This translates to approximately 900 individuals served annually out of a total of 35,000 recruits at JBSA-Lackland (2.57%; 737<sup>th</sup> Training Group).

#### **Procedure and results:**

The present study uses a descriptive, qualitative method to present the structure and development of this group, along with the needs it fills. Factors to be addressed in these results include: procedural description of meetings and session topics, attendance outcomes, and the systemic barriers faced by facilitators.

#### **Conclusion:**

The results of this study offer clear evidence that all branches of the military need to consider offering spiritual options for the unaffiliated. In addition, findings in this study offer guidance for the Air Force to consider broadening the chaplaincy to support the growing number of unaffiliated. Expanding the chaplaincy to incorporate Humanist chaplains would serve to address the spiritual needs of all their Airmen. Finally, implications are drawn on the impact of discrimination and systemic barriers that interfere with the development of programming for the religiously unaffiliated.

**Disclaimer:** The views expressed are those of the [author/presenter] and do not reflect the official views or policy of the Department of Defense or its Components. The voluntary, fully informed consent of the subjects used in this research was obtained as required by 32 CFR 219 and DoDI 3216.02\_AFI 40-402.